

Message Text

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64

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGR-20 EB-11 SIL-01 LAB-06 OMB-01 AID-20

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01

COME-00 /158 W

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R 141802Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WSHDC 9225

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GEORGETOWN 0044

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GY

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER DEFENDS NATIONAL SERVICE AMID
INCREASED PROTESTS

REF: GEORGETOWN 1871, DECEMBER 21, 1973

1. SUMMARY: DURING EIGHTY MINUTE ADDRESS TO JANUARY 9
SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM DEFENDED
PLANS FOR NATIONAL SERVICE. DESPITE BURNHAM'S ASSURANCES

THAT NATIONAL SERVICE WILL BE VOLUNTARY, OPPOSITION TO PLAN
CONTINUES AS EVIDENCED BY PICKETING OF PARLIAMENT, PROTESTS
ON SOME SUGAR ESTATES, AND BOYCOTT OF SCHOOLS IN CORENTYNE.
END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM'S PLANS FOR NATIONAL SERVICE
CONTINUE TO BE CENTER OF DEBATE AND DISCUSSION IN GUYANA.
DURING JANUARY 9 SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, BURNHAM
DEFENDED STATE PAPER ON NATIONAL SERVICE (REFTEL) WHILE
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OPPOSITION GROUPS PICKETED PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS. APPEARING IN

ASSEMBLY FOR FIRST TIME SINCE INJURING HIS KNEE IN DECEMBER, BURNHAM STATED NATIONAL SERVICE WILL BE KEY TO BUILDING UNIFIED, SELF-RELIANT, AND SELF-DISCIPLINED GUYANA. BURNHAM ANSWERED OPPOSITION CRITICISM THAT NATIONAL SERVICE WILL MEAN NATIONAL SLAVERY BY STRESSING SERVICE WILL INITIALLY BE VOLUNTARY IN ALL STAGES. DURING HIS EIGHTYMINUTE ADDRESS, BURNHAM ALSO DIRECTED COMMENTS AT HIS OWN SUPPORTERS WHOM HE CHASTIZED FOR FAILING TO HAVE PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK AND SACRIFICE NEEDED TO DEVELOP COUNTRY.

3. WHILE BURNHAM ADDRESSED ASSEMBLY, GROUP OF DEMONSTRATORS, ESTIMATED BY EMBOFF AT ONE HUNDRED FIFTY TO TWO HUNDRED PERSONS, PROTESTED OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT BUILDING. PLACARDS CARRIED BY PROTESTORS IDENTIFIED THEM AS SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) AND TWO OF ITS LABOR UNIONS, GUYANA AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION AND SAAWMILL AND FOREST WORKERS UNION. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MEMBERS OF OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS INCLUDING BLACK POWER ORIENTED AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH INDEPENDENT AFRICA ALSO TOOK PART IN PROTEST. WHEN COUNTER DEMONSTRATORS FROM RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS ARRIVED MINOR PUSHING AND SHOVING INCIDENTS FLARED UP BETWEEN GROUPS. AFTER ARRIVAL OF POLICE REINFORCEMENTS, OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATORS MARCHED OFF TWOARDS FREEDOM HOUSE, HEADQUARTERS OF PPP, AND DISPERSED. FURTHER PROTESTS AGAINST NATIONAL SERVICE ALSO TOOK PLACE ON SEVERAL SUGAR ESTATES AND REPORTEDLY IN PREDOMINENTLY EAST INDIAN CORENTYNE AREA CHILDREN STAYED HOME FROM SCHOOL.

4. COMMENT: DESPITE BURNHAM'S ASSURANCES THAT NATIONAL SERVICE WILL BE INITIALLY BASED ON VOLUNTEERS, IT IS STILL SENSITIVE ISSUE, PARTICULARLY AMONG GUYANESE OF EAST INDIAN DESCENT. FEARS THAT ONCE NATIONAL SERVICE BEGINS IT WILL EVENTUALLY BE COMPULSORY REMAIN AND RE BEING EXPLOITED BY PPP. LEGISLATION IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL SERVICE MUST STILL BE INTRODUCED IN ASSEMBLY AND WHEN THIS OCCURS FURTHER PROTESTS ARE LIKELY. KING

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